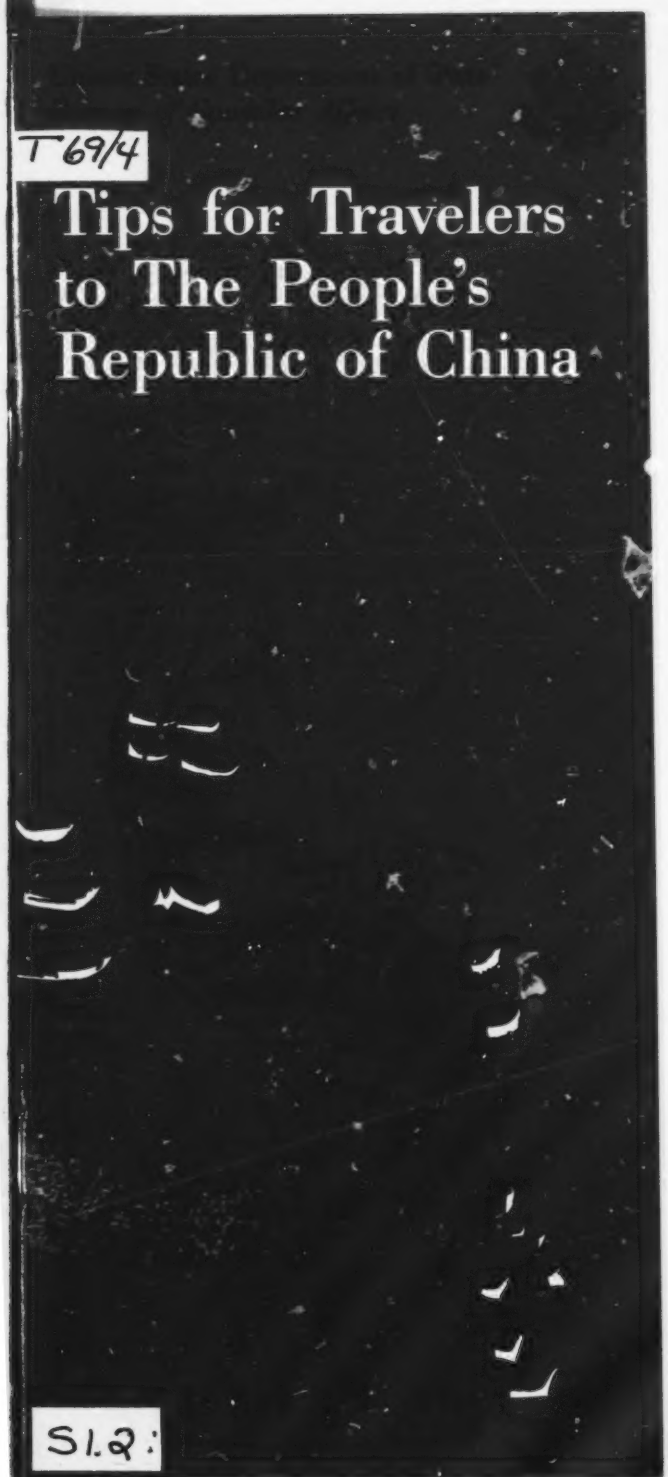
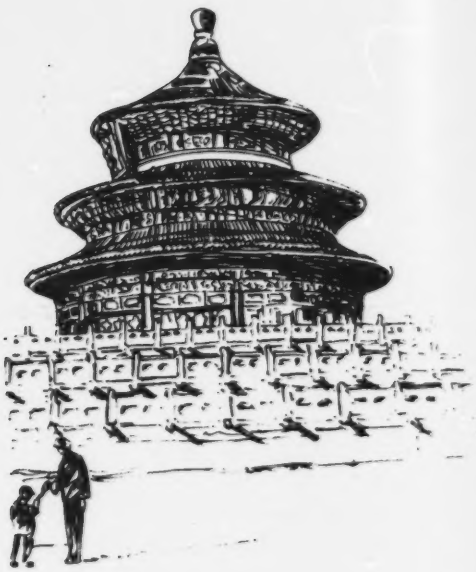
T 69/4

Tips for Travelers to The People's Republic of China



S1.2:

READEX FICHE best copy available



DEPARTMENT OF STATE PUBLICATION 9169
Bureau of Consular Affairs

Revised December 1988

For sale by the Superintendent of Documents
U.S. Government Printing Office
Washington, DC 20402

Cover: Longevity Palace and Blue Dragon Ca
Zhenyuan, Guizhou province.

Tips for Travelers to the People's Republic of China

U.S. citizens planning to visit the People's Republic of China (P.R.C.) should be aware of the following information in order to avoid inconvenience or serious difficulty while traveling.

Visa Requirements

To enter the People's Republic of China, a U.S. citizen must have a visa. China receives tens of thousands of visa requests annually from U.S citizens but cannot accommodate all of them because the number of hotels, interpreter-guides, and other facilities, although increasing, is still limited.

Business visas are issued on the basis of an invitation from one of the Chinese foreign trade organizations. If you wish to visit for business purposes, you must first correspond directly with the appropriate organization in China (e.g., China National Machinery Import-Export Corporation, etc.).

Visas for tour group members are usually obtained by the travel agent as part of the tour package. China International Travel Service (CITS) has exclusive responsibility for all foreign tourism in China. You may book a CITS tour through a number of travel agencies and airlines in the United States and abroad. You can find advertisements for these tours in newspapers or magazines, or you may contact the China National Tourist Office at: 60 E. 42d Street, Suite 3126; New York, NY 10165; (212) 867-0271.

Tourist visas for individuals were formerly difficult to obtain, but official policy toward individual travel has relaxed, facilities have increased, and a well-planned private trip is now feasible. Over 500 major Chinese urban

and tourist centers are now open to unrestricted travel. Unless you speak Chinese, however, you should plan to visit only the most popular tourist areas. To qualify for a visa to visit China on an individual or special interest group basis, you must have an invitation from an individual or institution in China, or a "letter of confirmation" from CITS in China. Write to: China International Travel Service, 6 East Changang Avenue, Beijing, People's Republic of China (telex: 22350 CITSH CN). In your request, include your name, date of birth, nationality, passport number, the dates and destinations of your trip, and your reason for the trip. Remember, however, that CITS may not be able to accommodate all requests for individual or special interest tours. You may have better luck in obtaining confirmation if you avoid the high seasons: April to June and September to October.

Once you have your invitation or letter, apply for a visa at the Chinese Embassy in Washington, D.C., or at a Chinese consulate in Chicago, Houston, Los Angeles, New York, or San Francisco. (Addresses are listed at the end of this pamphlet.) The current cost of a visa for China is $7. To apply, each person must send an application form, a valid passport, two photographs, and the fee. U.S. citizens applying for visas outside the United States may be requested to fill out visa application forms both in English and in Chinese.

If you wish to travel independently and do not want to make the arrangements yourself, some of the travel agents that arrange group tours will also arrange an FIT (Foreign Independent Travel) tour for you and, for an additional fee, will get your visa.

Whether you visit on your own or with a tour, allow at least 3 weeks for visa processing. The Chinese Embassy and consulates in the United States require at least 10 working days to process visas.

In addition to the requirements above, long-term visitors to China must have an AIDS test. The test is required for students, teachers, and

visiting scholars who plan to stay more than 9 months and for business persons who plan to stay over a year. If this applies to you, you may have the test done in the United States. However, the results of the test must indicate the test was given by a government facility such as your state's health department; or, if done at a private health facility, the results must be notarized by a notary public.

For individuals visiting Hong Kong en route, tours to China depart regularly from that city and may be booked through China Travel Service, LTD., 77 Queens Road, Central, Hong Kong (tel. 5–259–121) or 27–33 Nathan Road, Kowloon, Hong Kong (tel. 3–721–1331). (Cable address: TRAVEL BANK.) For a handling fee, individual visas for travel originating in Hong Kong may be obtained through these agencies

in 2 working days. If you have made travel arrangements and wish to obtain your visa on your own, apply to the visa office of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 5th Floor, Low Block, 26 Harbour Road, Wanchai, Hong Kong.

Note: All travelers transiting China, re-gardless of whether or not they are required to pass through customs and immigration, must have a transit visa or they will be fined $1,000.

Travel Arrangements Within China

Packaged tours can be at least double the cost of self-arranged tours. A packaged tour will, however, insulate you from some of the difficulties of booking travel by air or rail in China. Because transportation systems have not expanded as fast as the number of tourists has increased, travelers should be prepared for delays as long as several days. Planes and trains are often overbooked or are canceled because of mechanical problems.

The Civil Aviation Administration of China (CAAC) is responsible for all civilian aviation in China and operates both international and domestic flights. Air travel within China on international flights may only be booked as part of an international ticket. Once you are in China, you cannot book domestic air travel on the within-country segments of a CAAC or any other international flight; you may only book travel on domestic CAAC flights.

Round trip reservations and tickets are not available on CAAC flights. Onward arrangements must be made at each stop. Thus, passengers may arrive with reservations from Tokyo to Beijing, to Shanghai, to Hong Kong, and find that the flights after Beijing are nonexistent, or exist, but are fully booked.

Local CAAC agents issue tickets only for travel originating in their own cities. To confirm a reservation on a CAAC ticket purchased outside of China, present your ticket and passport to the local CAAC office at least 3 working days (Monday–Friday) before departure. Hotels, for a fee, will sometimes assist in making reservations and purchasing tickets on CAAC flights if you make the request in advance. Plane reservations to the most popular tourist cities must often be made a month in advance.

Train travel is similarly difficult to reserve, and trains are often overbooked. Round trip rail tickets are not sold. Beware of counterfeit train tickets. Unethical entrepreneurs have

been caught manufacturing and selling such tickets at railway stations.

Restricted Areas

Visitors to China should be aware that Chinese regulations strictly prohibit travel in certain areas without special permission. However, over 500 cities and areas in China are open to visitors without special travel permits, including most major scenic and historical sites. If you need to know if an area is open to travel without a permit, seek advice from the nearest Chinese embassy or consulate, or, if you are already in China, from the U.S. Embassy in Beijing or the nearest American consulate. (See addresses at the end of the pamphlet.)

Travel to Tibet

Americans visiting Tibet, whether individually or in tour groups, should be aware that all areas of the region are closed to foreign travel except for Lhasa, Shigatze (Xigaze), Naqu, Zedong, Zhang Muxkhasa, and the main roads between these points. Special permission to visit any of the closed areas must be obtained from the region's public security bureau. At time of publication, there is a ban on individual travel anywhere within Tibet. Occasionally, visitors have been refused admission or had difficulty entering Tibet from Nepal. In addition, the Kathmandu/Lhasa highway that connects Nepal and Tibet can be washed out in the monsoon season, from June through September. Avoid this road during the monsoon.

Virtually all of the Tibetan autonomous region, much of Qinghai and Xinjiang, and parts of Sichuan, Yannan, and Gansu are above 13,000 feet (4,000 meters) in altitude. Some main roads in Tibet, Qinghai, and Xinjiang go above 17,000 feet (5,200 meters), where available oxygen is only half of that at sea level. Conditions in Tibet are primitive, and travel there can be particularly arduous. Medical facilities are practically nonexistent. Many otherwise healthy visitors to the high altitude areas may suffer severe headaches, nausea, dizziness, shortness of breath, or a dry cough. These symptoms usually disappear after a few days of acclimatization. However, if symptoms persist, sufferers should descend to a lower altitude, or seek medical assistance. Visitors with respiratory or cardiac problems should avoid such high altitudes. Consult a physician before making the trip.

Travel on the Trans-Siberian Express

If you wish to take the Trans-Siberian railway from Beijing to Berlin, you must obtain visas from Mongolia and Poland before the Soviet Union will issue a transit visa. Plan ahead,

because the Mongolian Consulate in Beijing is only open a few hours per week and those hours may vary.

Customs

Foreign visitors to the P.R.C. are allowed to import 4 bottles of wine and 600 cigarettes with their personal belongings. Any items of value, such as watches, radios, calculators, and still, movie, or video cameras must be declared. They may be imported duty free for personal use but may not be transferred or sold to others. Gifts and articles carried on behalf of others must be declared to the customs inspector and are subject to duty.

Chinese customs regulations prohibit the import or export of the following items:

(a) arms, ammunition, and explosives;
(b) radio transmitter-receivers and principal parts;
(c) Chinese currency (*renminbi*);
(d) books, films, records, tapes, etc., which are "detrimental to China's politics. economy, culture, and ethics";
(e) poisonous drugs and narcotics;
(f) infected animal or plant products; and
(g) infected foodstuffs.

Note: Videotapes will be seized by customs to determine that they do not violate prohibitions noted in item (d), above. Tapes are sometimes held for several months before being returned.

Export of the following items is also prohibited:

(a) valuable cultural relics and rare books relating to the Chinese revolution, history, culture, and art;
(b) rare animals, rare plants and their seeds; and
(c) precious metals and diamonds and articles made from them.

Antiques which are approved for export are marked with a red wax seal.

According to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, improper glazing of some dinnerware

for sale in China can cause lead contamination in food. Therefore, unless you have proof of its safety, dinnerware purchased in China should be used for decorative purposes only. Chinese commercial shipments of dinnerware to the United States are tested to conform to U.S. safety standards.

If you seek to enter China with religious materials, such as Bibles, in a quantity greater than what is considered needed for personal use, you could be detained and fined.

Currency Regulations

Chinese currency is called *yuan* or, more commonly, *renminbi* (RMB). The official rate of exchange of RMB to the U.S. dollar was 3.72 as of December 1988. The import of Chinese currency is prohibited, except in the form of RMB traveler's checks, which are available from the Bank of China in Hong Kong. Although there is no limit on the amount of foreign currency which may be brought into China, all foreign currency must be declared to customs upon entry.

The only legal place where foreign currency (cash or traveler's checks) may be exchanged for Chinese currency is an exchange facility of the Bank of China. Foreign currency is exchanged for Foreign Exchange Certificates in RMB denominations. The certificates are used just as ordinary RMB is used and are required for all transactions made by foreigners. Keep your exchange receipts to show as evidence if you need to convert Chinese currency back to foreign currency when you depart China. Buying regular RMB on the black market is illegal, dangerous, and, moreover, impractical—there is almost no place that will accept regular RMB from a foreigner, and it cannot be converted to foreign currency when you leave.

Money exchange facilities are also available at the airports, hotels, and "friendship stores." Major brands of traveler's checks and credit cards are selectively accepted by various

facilities in China, and a nominal service charge is usually added to the latter. Consult with your bank before departing the United States to be sure that your brand of check or credit card will be accepted.

Health

Information on health precautions for travelers can be obtained in the United States from local health departments, the U.S. Public Health Service, private doctors, and travel clinics. For China, immunizations are recommended for diphtheria, tetanus, and polio. A gamma globulin shot may offer protection against hepatitis A. In addition, immunization for Japanese B encephalitis (JE) is recommended during the epidemic summer months for visitors planning to stay longer than 2 or 3 weeks. At present, no vaccine for JE is available in the United States, but it can be obtained in Japan or Hong Kong. Malaria occurs in China, particularly in rural areas and in southern China. Depending on the season and your destination, you may need to take antimalarial drugs, use insect repellant, and take other measures to reduce contact with mosquitoes.

Few cities in China have Western-style pharmacies stocked with drugs common in the United States. Therefore, carry medications in your hand luggage to avoid emergencies should your checked luggage go astray.

Foreign visitors who become ill in China are provided with the best medical care available in the country. Generally speaking, the doctors and nurses are qualified and competent, but hospital accommodations are Spartan, and medical technology is not up-to-date.

Hospital costs for non-Chinese visitors are similar to those charged for similar services in the United States. Prospective travelers should review their health insurance policies. If your policy does not provide coverage overseas, consider buying coverage that does. In addition, insurance covering medical

evacuation is highly recommended. Although several private companies offer evacuation service in the P.R.C., the cost can be extremely high. For example, the estimated cost of evacuation, using a stretcher and with a medical escort, from Beijing to San Francisco is between $16,000 and $22,000.

Tourist travel in China can be extremely strenuous and may be especially debilitating to someone in poor health. Tours often involve walking long distances and up steep hills. All visitors, especially those with a history of coronary/pulmonary problems, should have a complete medical checkup before making final travel plans. Plans should include rest time and avoiding overly full schedules that could lead to exhaustion or illness. China discourages travel by persons who are ill, pregnant, or of advanced age. Visa applicants over 60 usually are required to complete a health questionnaire. If medical problems exist, a letter from your physician in the United States explaining treatment and, if relevant, copies of your most recent electrocardiograms would be helpful in case a medical emergency occurs in China.

Air pollution in the large cities is often severe, particularly in winter when soft coal is burned in the northern cities. It is common for tourists to become afflicted with respiratory ailments.

Visitors are advised not to drink the tapwater in China. Hotels almost always supply boiled water that is safe to drink. Bottled water and carbonated drinks are sold in stores. Carry water purification tablets to use when neither boiled water nor bottled drinks are available.

Dual Nationality

The status of American citizens who might also be considered Chinese citizens under Chinese law was addressed in the agreement on consular relations between the United States and the People's Republic of China, signed in Washington, D.C., on January 31, 1979. The agreement states that U.S. citizens entering

the P.R.C. on a U.S. passport containing a Chinese visa will be considered by Chinese authorities to be U.S. nationals for the purpose of consular protection, and that such persons shall have the right of departure from the P.R.C. without further documentation, regardless of whether they might also be regarded as Chinese citizens.

A U.S. citizen must enter and leave the United States on a U.S. passport. If you are a dual national and wish to use a Chinese passport to enter and travel in China, you may do so, but be aware that you will be considered and treated as a Chinese national by Chinese authorities.

While You Are in China

All American citizens visiting China for a month or more, or who expect to receive communications from the United States, are encouraged to register with the American Embassy in Beijing or the nearest American consulate. Registration will assist our posts in China in locating you in the event of an emergency at home or in replacing a lost or stolen passport. You should also photocopy the data page of your passport and keep it in a separate place from your passport. In the event your passport is lost, stolen, or in the possession of foreign government officials, you will have the requisite information available.

American citizens should be aware that foreign visitors and residents in China have sometimes been detained and heavily fined for having improper sexual relations with Chinese citizens. In most of these cases, the foreigners involved had invited Chinese citizens to their hotel rooms. Any U.S. citizen who is detained by Chinese authorities for questioning regarding this or any other violation of Chinese law or regulations should notify the American Embassy or nearest consulate as soon as possible.

Chinese Embassy and Consulates in the UnitedStates

Embassy of the People's
Republic of China
2300 Connecticut Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20008
(202) 328–2517

Chinese Consulate General
104 South Michigan Avenue,
Suite 1200
Chicago, Illinois 60603
(312) 346–0287

Chinese Consulate General
3417 Montrose Boulevard
Houston, Texas 77006
(713) 524–4311

Chinese Consulate General
502 Shatto Place, Suite 300
Los Angeles, California 90020
(213) 380–2507

Chinese Consulate General
520 12th Avenue
New York, New York 10036
(212) 279–4275

Chinese Consulate General
1450 Laguna Street
San Francisco, California 94115
(415) 563–4885

U.S. Embassy and Consulates Abroad

APO and FPO addresses may only be used for mail originating in the United States. When you use an APO or FPO address, do not include the local street address.

People's Republic of China

American Embassy
Xiu Shui Bei Jie 3
Beijing
Tel: (86)(1) 532–3831
Telex: 22701 AMEMB CN
Mailing address:
FPO San Francisco 96655

American Consulate General
Dong Fang Hotel—11th Floor
Guangzhou
Tel: (86)(20) 669-900, ext. 1000
Telex: 44439 GDZFH CN
Mailing address: Box 100,
FPO San Francisco 96655–0002

American Consulate General
1469 Huai Hai Middle Road
Shanghai
Tel: (86)(21) 336–880
Telex: 33383 USCG CN
Mailing address: Box 200,
FPO San Francisco 96655–0002

American Consulate General
40 Lane 4, Section 5
Sanjing Street, Heping District
Shenyang, Liaoning
Tel: (86)(24) 290-000
Telex: 80011 AMCS CN
Mailing address: Box 45,
FPO San Francisco 96659–0002

American Consulate General
Jinjiang Hotel
180 Renmin Nanlu
Chengdu, Sichuan FPO
Tel: (86)(1) 24481
Telex: 60128 ACGCH
Mailing address: Box 85,
FPO San Francisco 96659–0002

Hong Kong

American Consulate General
26 Garden Road
Hong Kong
Tel: (852)(5) 239–011
Telex: 63141 USDOC H
Mailing address: Box 30,
FPO San Francisco 96659–0002

Pla ning Another Trip?

For eral travel information, the following pam ets may be ordered for $1 each from the Sup tendent of Documents, U.S. Government mer rinting Office, Washington, D.C. 20420:

ur Trip Abroad

Safe Trip Abroad

ravel Tips for Senior Citizens

Tips for Americans Residing Abroad

Copies of the following publications in this series are also available for $1 each from the U.S. Government Printing Office:

Tips for Travelers to Sub-Saharan Africa
Tips for Travelers to the Caribbean
Tips for Travelers to Central and South America
Tips for Travelers to Cuba
Tips for Travelers to Eastern Europe and Yugoslavia
Tips for Travelers to Mexico
Tips for Travelers to the Middle East and North Africa
Tips for Travelers to South Asia
Tips for Travelers to the U.S.S.R.